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They're the spies who came out of the cold

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Almost imperceptibly, the Central Intelligence Agency has come out of the cold in the last two years.

It's quite unlike the Vietnam era, when student indignation drove CIA recruiters away from campuses with major demonstrations. Now, at many university career planning departments, the welcome mat is out.

"The CIA has greatly increased activity on our campus and we've been talking about it," said USC career opportunities office director Sharon Slavin. "At Career Day last fall, CIA representatives collected 55 resumes. They are unique in that they can offer a graduating student a position which is fairly independent, has a high degree of responsibility, and they can become a specialist in two or three years."

The CIA is conducting a full-scale public relations blitz and taking its show on the road to more than 100 colleges and universities annually.

Although recent charges about CIA covert activities in Nicaragua have rekindled protests on about a dozen campuses nationwide, most students are responding to the CIA's more low-key approach.

"When they came here, they had four or five recent college graduates tell students about various career opportunities," said USC International Relations job placement adviser Carol Gustin. "I found their new approach very interesting. They used words like 'case workers in human intelligence' instead of spies."

UCLA had 16 students interviewed by a CIA recruiter on campus in October. "The local personnel office of the CIA has placed a job listing here at UCLA and they told us the response has been very good," said Charles Sundberg, head of the UCLA career placement center. "The CIA is doing very well attracting the types of students who might be recruited by major corporations."

"Apparently a good number of our students are interested in going to work for the CIA," said Chris Shinkman, director of Stanford's career planning and placement center. "This is a pretty dramatic change since the 1970s. Ten years ago when I was at Cornell, the CIA wouldn't have been able to come to Cornell, there would have been a big demonstration."

There was a demonstration by about a dozen students at Stanford when CIA recruiters came on campus in February 1984, said Shinkman. About 25 students signed up for interviews then.

A CIA newspaper advertisement calls for slightly more modest versions of James Bond with starting pay ranging from \$22,000 to \$34,000.

"The most important decisions depend on information our adversaries seek to conceal," says the ad. "A truly extraordinary group of men and women serve abroad as the key players in our national effort to fill these critical information gaps."

CIA Public Affairs spokeswoman Patti Volz said this week in Washington, "We had a record 150,000 job applications last year." According to Volz, that's the highest applicant pool ever.

"From 1979, we have continually strengthened our numbers of personnel and their quality. Now, as a result, we have the highest quality of intelligence and analysis ever in the agency's history. Public attitudes toward the agency have come almost full circle since the 1970s. There has been a great increase in the national spirit in the last five to eight years."

Echoing the ironic phrase that David Halberstam used as the title of his book chronicling America's policy and intelligence failure in Vietnam, Volz said, "We're getting the best and the brightest now, so we can afford to be picky these days."

Nzingha Clarke, a student at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., who led eight fellow students in an attempted citizen's arrest of a CIA recruiter on campus March 12, said that part of the reason students are once again open to the CIA is a short memory.

"America has a problem with political amnesia," she said. "The main conception of the CIA has changed recently, but it is not because people think they have reformed or are no longer doing dirty tricks. They are doing them openly in Nicaragua. We hear students say, 'Sure we know the CIA does terrible things, but international politics isn't meant to be nice and polite.'"

"I am not totally pro-CIA, I am not totally against what it's done," said Peter Dombrowski, a Williams student whose CIA interview was interrupted by the demonstration. "But I think they have an important job to do. They can change what the CIA does wrong by protesting to their congressman, but don't get in my way when I'm trying to get a job."

There have been similar demonstrations at Yale, Tufts, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Northwestern and Brown. Clarke and other protesters claim that the CIA isn't adhering to its charter to avoid insurgencies to topple governments and political assassinations and domestic intelligence.

"Our image was very poor, with good reason," said Volz. "Things were done the agency should not have done. But after the Church Committee report in 1975 and the Rockefeller Commission report in 1976, reforms were made. In the mid-1970s, our numbers of analysts were cut by 50 percent. Since then, things have come full circle."

Although the size of the CIA remains classified information, it is likely that the big applicant pool has resulted in better agents, not more of them.

"It's a lot harder to get into the CIA than accepted at Yale," said Volz.

Larry Curran, CIA national deputy director of recruiting, said that only one of 17 applicants who have been culled from the original applicant pool gets a job. But, with the changing times, the CIA has changed their standards to better fit today's society.

"In 1966, when I started with the CIA, only 1 of 10 applicants had experimented with drugs," he said. "Now that figure is 8 of 10. Cohabitation would have excluded candidates in 1966; that is no longer the case."

Curran said that some drug experimentation doesn't kill an applicant's chances. "We look at the total lifestyle," he said. "If they are accepted, they are told to stay off drugs. They get one warning, then it's out."

The requirements are tough, but remain flexible, said Curran. The general cutoff point for applicants is a 3.0 grade average. "But we'll look at someone with a 2.8 who speaks Hungarian they learned at home," he said. They are looking for people with expertise in languages, computer technology and all the sciences.

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